

More and more Texas high schools are offering students the opportunity to participate in College Board Advanced Placement courses and exams. Advanced Placement courses and exams challenge students on a higher academic level, while introducing them to and preparing them for a college education. To help parents better understand the AP Program and how it can help their student, the Texas Education Agency has compiled *Questions and Answers for Parents on Advanced Placement Courses and Exams*.

What is the Advanced Placement Program?

The Advanced Placement Program, administered by The College Board of New York and taught at local high schools, allows students to participate in a college level course and possibly earn college credit while still in high school. Secondary schools and colleges cooperate in this program to give students the opportunity to show mastery in college-level courses by taking the AP exam in May of each school year.

What are the advantages of my child taking an AP course?

The main advantage of taking an AP course is better preparation for college. It has been shown that students master in depth content at the college level more easily after completing AP courses in high school. Students also acquire sophisticated academic skills and increased self-confidence in preparation for college.

Scoring well on an AP exam can lead to the requirements of the Texas Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP). This special program requires high performance beyond that expected of students in high school. Those who meet the requirements of this program are awarded a special seal on their high school transcript. The DAP Program replaces the current advanced program and advanced program with honors.

Additionally, students who take AP exams may receive college credit while still in high school, saving both time and money. Credit on AP exams can save up to \$1,500 in college tuition alone and/or count as credit for one or more courses. Some parents have saved what would be the equivalent of \$18,000 for a full year of college and total living expenses for their student. However, check with the college you are interested in to see if they accept AP exams for credits.

How does an AP class compare to other high school courses?

AP classes are more challenging and stimulating, but they take more time and require more work. AP classes require energetic, involved, and motivated students.

Why should I encourage my child to take an AP class? Won't it hurt my child's GPA?

Students who succeed in AP courses generally do well in college as a result of rigorous academic preparation. Many high schools give extra grade point weight on the GPA for taking an AP course and exam. In this way, a student's GPA is not adversely affected by taking accelerated AP courses. Colleges look favorably on students who tackle AP courses. Your child can also meet the requirements of the Texas Distinguished Achievement Program by taking AP courses and attaining a score of 3 or above.

What is the Texas Distinguished Achievement Program?

The Distinguished Achievement Program replaces the present advanced high school program and advanced high school program with honors. The new program is based on students completing the 24-credit recommended high school program. Within those credits, students must complete advanced measures at the college or professional level that are assessed by outside evaluators. In order to achieve this distinguished recognition, students must complete any combination of four of the advanced measures listed below:

- earn a score of 3 or above on a College Board AP exam or a score of 4 or above on an IB exam (Each exam can count as one measure.)
- complete original research or project judged by a panel of professionals in the field that is the focus of the project or conducted under the direction of mentor(s) and reported to an appropriate audience
- a score on the PSAT that qualifies a student for recognition as a Commended Scholar or higher
- a grade of 3.0 or higher on courses that count for college credit
- a license awarded by a professional board or association (This item may count for only one advanced measure regardless of the number of licenses received.)

For more information see "Questions & Answers on the Distinguished Achievement Program" published by the Texas Education Agency. Your high school should have a copy.

What background does my child need in order to succeed in an AP course?

The content of AP courses is more sophisticated than that in typical high school honors courses. Students should have had practice in analyzing content, drawing comparisons, and reasoning through problems. They must be able to read perceptively and independently. Additionally, students will need to be proficient in writing clear, concise essays. Students who are not skilled in these areas must be even more highly motivated to make up deficiencies at the same time they are taking more rigorous courses. The earlier students prepare for AP or college courses by taking the most rigorous classes available, the more likely will be their success. The keys to success are motivation, self-discipline, and academic preparation.

What AP courses/exams do high schools offer?

High schools are not required by the state to offer AP courses though the state offers an incentive program for schools that do. However, many high schools are adding AP courses each year. There are 31 AP exams in 16 disciplines coordinated and administered by The College Board. These exams contain both multiple choice questions and free-response items (except Studio Art) that require essays, problem solving and other skills. The exams include Art, Art History, Studio Art (General, Drawing), Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science (A,AB), Economics (Microeconomics, Macroeconomics), English (Language and Composition, Literature and Composition), Environmental Science, French (Language, Literature), German (Language), Government and Politics (Comparative, U.S.), History (European, U.S.), Latin (Virgil, Literature), Mathematics (Calculus AB, Calculus BC) Statistics, Music Theory, Physics (B, C: Mechanics, C: Electricity & Magnetism), Psychology, and Spanish (Language, Literature).

How much does it cost for my child to take an AP course? exam?

There are no charges for the courses if they are part of a school's curriculum. Distance learning AP courses may include nominal fees. The exams are approximately \$75 each. Financial assistance from The College Board for students in need can reduce the cost to approximately \$45 each. Additionally, the Texas Advanced Placement Incentive Program provides up to \$25 for exam fees of students who meet the requirements. The total fee may be reduced to approximately \$18 per exam. The AP coordinator at your school has details for these requests.

Will my child receive college credit?

The AP exams are given every year in May. Scores are reported to the colleges designated by the student and range from 1 (no recommendation) to 5 (extremely qualified). Each college determines the scores to be accepted for credit, but most consider a score of at least 3. Colleges may award three, and sometimes six, hours of credit per test. Students should contact individual colleges to find out about the policy of each.

Does my child have to take an AP course in order to take an AP exam?

No. However, research indicates that students who take AP courses score higher on AP exams than those students who do not take the courses. The courses may not be called "AP" but should be designed according to AP course descriptions. The courses may be designated as an honors course, a tutorial, independent study, a college-prep course, or advanced or experimental course.

How can I assist my child with doing well in AP courses?

Preparation for AP courses should begin early. You can encourage your child's academic pursuits, help him or her schedule time wisely, encourage and require strong study skills, set up a good study atmosphere, and participate in college and AP planning with your child and the school counselor, principal, or teacher. Your support is important. Encourage your school to develop pre-AP courses in grades 6-12.

How can I be sure the courses my children take before enrolling in AP courses are preparing them for AP classes?

The College Board encourages schools to form vertical teams (teachers in one subject in grades 6-12) to plan curriculum so that students learn early how to tackle challenging courses. The teachers are encouraged to coordinate their classes and assure that they are preparing students. Training for teachers and administrators is offered throughout the year both on the regional and state level.

What if my child takes an AP course in the fall on a block schedule but the exam is not offered until the spring?

The exams are offered only once a year in May. Many high schools offer review/refresher courses in April for those students who take the course in the fall.

I don't think our high school offers AP courses or exams. What has to be done so it can?

There are several options. Some recommendations are to:

- talk to the high school principal and/or counselor about setting up a program. They can receive training and assistance from the education service center in the area. The Texas Education Agency (Division of Advanced Academic Services) and The Advanced Placement Program Office of the Southwestern Region of The College Board both located in Austin, also can assist districts. Contacts for these offices are listed below.
- join with other schools, if your school is small, to form a cooperative in order to schedule teachers to teach particular courses.
- investigate AP courses offered through distance-learning networks (satellite TV courses, *e.g.* TI-IN and Ideanet).

Are there other ways to earn college credit besides AP exams?

Yes. Some options are:

- dual credit courses (both high school and college courses) offered through colleges and universities throughout the state. The courses may be taught at either the high school or college campus by a qualified teacher. Tuition and textbook fees may be required.
- college correspondence courses offered to high school students through Texas Tech University and the University of Texas at Austin.
- CLEP (College Level Examination Program) exams offered by colleges and universities. Check with the office of academic affairs at each college for more information and procedures.

For more information contact:

The Education Service Center in your region

Division of Advanced Academic Services
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701
512/463-9455

Advanced Placement Office
The College Board Southwestern Region
98 San Jacinto Blvd., Suite 1050
Austin, TX 78701-4039
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To order additional copies of this brochure, contact the Division of Advanced Academic Services at 512/463-9455.



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